

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 20, 2012

Agenda Item: Forego Management of Madison Buffalo Jump State Park

Division: Parks

Action Needed: Tentative Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Madison Buffalo Jump State Park includes 638.4 acres of land, with 617.5 of those acres (designated as School Trust lands) owned by the Montana Dept. of Natural Resource Conservation (DNRC) and 20.9 acres owned by FWP. The state park is open year around for day use activities and has averaged 3,786 visitors and \$1,839 in earned revenue annually from 2008 through 2012. The Parks Division is responsible for a full scope of park operations and maintenance, including visitor use management and resource protection. Annual operating costs (personnel and operations) have averaged \$15,192 from fiscal year 2008 through 2012.

It has been proposed that Montana State Parks pay a \$4,272 annual fee (plus 2% annual increase) to DNRC for use of the School Trust property. Since executing the lease in 1967, the Parks Division has not provided this annual compensation. This was an issue identified in a financial-compliance audit conducted on DNRC by the Legislative Audit Division for two fiscal years ending June 30, 2012 that also affected Lewis and Clark Caverns.

Montana State Parks is challenged to sustain the parks system. In the last three years the department has decommissioned Parker Homestead, and turned back other lands under easement or lease specifically, Fort Maginnis, and Citadel Rock to DNRC as part of reducing the size of the park system holdings. Given the fiscal challenges and fundamental concerns, Montana State Parks is proposing to forego management control of this property.

It should also be noted that while Madison Buffalo Jump State Park contains highly significant cultural resources, the state park system also includes First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park which is considered one of the largest buffalo jump sites in the country and is proposed for National Historic Landmark status.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The Parks Division proposes to conduct a 30-day comment period to solicit public input on the proposed relinquishment of management control Madison Buffalo Jump State Park due to its significance, level of development and higher profile designation as a park unit.

Alternatives and Analysis: The Parks Division has identified the following alternatives to address this issue:

- 1) Forego management and sell or trade the 20.9 acres of fee title land to DNRC or another party.
- 2) Seek legislation to relieve Montana State Parks from DNRC lease fees in return for management of the property.
- 3) Deny this request, direct the division to pay the lease fee and evaluate the health of the park system more broadly to systematically address this statewide issue as to what parks should and should not be in the system.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends that the Commission endorse the Parks Division proposal to seek public comment to forego management control of Madison Buffalo Jump State Park.

Proposed Motion: "I move to endorse soliciting public comment to forego management of Madison Buffalo Jump State Park."